Regina Leader

By George Shepherd,

West Plains, Sask.

FIGHTING JOE WYLIE

Reading today of the verbal battles in our legislative buildings at Regina one is reminded of the times when wordy battles in our legislative assembly really did raise the roof.

The late D.J. Wylie represented Maple Creek constituency some 30 years ago. It is said that our well-loved Dr. W.R. Motherwell and Joe Wylie were wont to tangle in heated discussions in the house, to such an extent that to the horrified onlookers there could only be one result--pistols at sunrise. But, the heat of the debate over, these two doughty warriors would emerge from the buildings arms in arm.

That the title of Fightin' Joe was not earned for his exploits in the legislative assembly alone, the following incident will show. This little gem was related to the writer by Gabriel Lavallie, aged Metis of the Cypress Hills who says as follows:

"It was somewhere about 1884 that I was in Medicine Hat and first met Joe Wylie. It was on a Sunday afternoon and about the only thing to do in those days on Sunday was to get drunk, fight, or go horse racing. This Sunday there was a big crowd out on the race track, which was a flat place up on the river bank south of town. There was a big fellow up there named Ed Rowe selling whiskey at 50 cents a cup.

"There was also a big guy up there named Jack Boudoin iding a big heavy horse with a large Mexican saddle and taperderas. And there was this big Englishman, Fightin' Joe Wylie, who must have been about six feet four inches in height, riding a large black horse that he called Nigger.

"Abunch of Frenchmen, lumberjacks from the east, had just blown into the Hat from Calgary and, as I was holding Mr. Wylie's horse at the time, they suggested that I race with Boudoin for stakes of $25 a side with Wylie to hold the stakes. They were talking among themselves in French, and saying that if they won they would get the money, and that if they lost they would take the stakes away from Mr. Wylie anyway. They asked me if I could talk French, which I could, but I told them that I could only talk a little Spanish, so they talked very freely among themselves. I told Mr. Wylie of their plans and he gave a short laugh and said, 'Allright, let them try it out.'

"Well, we ran the race and I won. At this the Frenchmen came running up to Joe say that it had been a foul start and that they wanted all the money. Wylie was waiting for them, and, peeling off his coat, gave it to me, telling me to start off for town on his horse and that he would follow on foot. Just then the big Frenchman, who was the leader of the gang, came running at Mr. Wylie. I did not exactly see what happened, but I saw the big Englishman sort of stick out his leg and trip and hit the Frenchman, who rolled over a couple of times and then lay very still on the grass.

"Joe was on the run by this time, following me up, and every time a Frenchman would catch up to him he would stick out his leg, hit him and leave him piled ina heap. Joe, being a professional football player, seemed to know just how to trip and hit them. He must have downed three or four of them but finally three of them caught up to him. At this Joe just turned about and faced them and all you could see was flying legs and arms and all you could hear was French cuss words and good old English oaths. But Joe downed them all and jogged along onfoot into town. I never saw such a man to fight. He really seemed to enjoy it.

"The next day Mr. Wylie met me in the bar and gave me a few drinks, and also the $25. Mr. Wylie's arms were black and blue where those Frenchmen had clawed the shirt sleeves off him but the Frenchmen I saa around town later looked a whole lot worse. The last time I saw Mr. Wylie, just before he died, he was pretty ill and said, "Well, Gabe, I don't suppose we'll ever run horses at Medicine Hat again'."

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During the Riel rebellion of 1885, D.J. Wylie joined the home guard of Medicine Hat. After the Riel rebellion he managed the Sir Lyster Kaye farm out of Kincorth, and when that outfit went broke he bought beef for a while. Later he ranched 50 miles south of Maple Creek under the name of the Maple Creek Cattle Co. The original Wylie ranch is now in the hands of the two Wylie boys, Monty and Babe. It is one of the show places, and one of the most successful of the few remaining large ranches left in the Cypress Hills.